

ACTION AF-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CA-00	CIAE-00	INL-00
	DODE-00	DS-00	EB-00	UTED-00	H-00	TEDE-00	INR-00
	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00	NSAE-00	OIC-00	PA-00	GIWI-00
	PRS-00	P-00	SGAC-00	SP-00	SSO-00	SS-00	STR-00
	TRSE-00	EVR-00	FMP-00	BBG-00	IIP-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00
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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2608
INFO SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHINGTON DC

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SENSITIVE

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BC](#)
SUBJECT: BYE-ELECTION VICTORIES HEARTEN OPPOSITION

11. (U) SUMMARY: Botswana's opposition parties scored a victory by combining forces to win a parliamentary seat and a local council seat in an October 15 bye-election. The President of Botswana's largest opposition party, the Botswana National Front (BNF), Mr. Otsweletse Moupo bested wealthy philanthropist and Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) candidate Robert Masitara in the race to occupy a vacant parliamentary seat. More important than the seats won is the possible precedent this sets for opposition parties to oust ruling BDP politicians from office by cooperating in the next general election. The bye-election also saw the first instance of a privately-owned newspaper openly endorsing a candidate, in this case the opposition candidate, an act decried by the BDP campaign manager. Moupo's victory against the well-funded Masitara indicates that Botswana's multi-party democracy remains vibrant and competitive despite 40 years of domination by the BDP. END SUMMARY.

MONEY CAN'T BUY VOTES

12. (U) In an October 15 bye-election for the Gaborone West North National Assembly seat vacated by the late Paul Rantao (BNF), Otsweletse Moupo, President of the BNF, defeated BDP candidate and wealthy philanthropist Robert Masitara. Masitara attracted attention by handing out food and even one hundred pula notes to audience members. Despite his considerable financial advantage and ostentatious generosity, Masitara lost decidedly. His candidacy had provoked widespread criticism, especially from women's groups, because he is currently facing charges for allegedly having raped an employee. Moupo will now take over as Leader of the Opposition, offering him a larger platform from which to articulate an alternate policy agenda and providing the opposition a more effective champion.

OPPOSITION TAKES COUNCIL SEAT FROM BDP

13. (U) Political parties also contested for a council seat in the village of Ramotswa, southwest of Gaborone, on October 15. Opposition parties united behind a candidate from the Botswana Congress Party to win the seat, which had been vacated due to the death of its erstwhile occupant from the BDP. Although just a council seat, this victory gave tangible support to the contention that opposition parties finally could make good on their promise to cooperate to overcome the BDP.

14. (U) After the announcement of the results in Ramotswa, BDP campaign manager Matshediso Fologang said BDP lost because of the factions within the party, noting that the candidate and the MP for the area came from different sides of the party. He added that divisions within the party are so intense that voters are starting to question the party's ability to deliver on campaign promises, and predicted declining fortunes for the BDP in that constituency.

PRIVATE PAPER ENDORSES CANDIDATE FOR FIRST TIME

15. (U) For the first time in Botswana, a newspaper explicitly endorsed a candidate for political office. The front page of the October 14 edition of *Mmegi*, Botswana's only privately-owned daily, urged readers to "Vote Moupo!" Although the independent press generally is considered sympathetic to the opposition, no paper had ever clearly endorsed a particular candidate before. Mesh Moeti, editor of the *Mmegi* newspaper, told the embassy Political Assistant that he felt it was their

responsibility as a newspaper to articulate a clear position on an important election. As if anticipating criticism from the ruling party, Moeti observed that endorsing a candidate is a standard practice the world over and that Mmegi would support a BDP candidate if they conclude that he or she were the most qualified.

16. (U) BDP Executive Secretary Comma Serema predictably but improbably blamed his party colleague's loss on Mmegi's headlines. Masitara's dejected campaign manager hinted drkly that this incident exposed the need for someaspects of the electoral regulations to be refored. On October 18, the BDP registered a complaint with the Media Complaints Committee, a body established by the media sector to help regulate the conduct of its members, arguing that the endorsement violated "the standards of journalism and the code of ethics." In an October 20 conversation with Pol Assistant, Serema explained that BDP submitted a complaint to test whether or not the recently established Committee would take action against an "erring" paper but did not sound intent on pursuing the issue further.

VICE PRESIDENT REBUKES ELECTION OFFICIAL

17. (SBU) In the week leading up to the election, Vice President Khama reportedly visited the Secretary of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to complain that an IEC official had made partisan remarks against Masitara's candidacy. In a conversation with Pol Assistant, an IEC employ indicated that this intervention had left his colleagues "scared" of the potential consequences of voicing their opinions unguardedly. Whether the Vice President merely intended to promote the professional and impartial conduct of elections or sought to quiet a critic, the incident contributed to a perception of him as intolerant of opposing views.

BYE-ELECTIONS: ANOTHER COST OF HIV/AIDS

18. (U) The elections for the Gaborone West North parliamentary seat and the council seat in Ramotswa were the fifth and sixth bye-elections since the October 30, 2004, general election necessitated by the death of an incumbent or candidate. Although it is rare for families to acknowledge that a loved one died because of HIV/AIDS, the absence of a known cause of death indicates a high probability that these politicians died from an AIDS-related illness. In addition to the administrative costs of conducting the elections, constituents suffer the political cost of losing experienced representatives prematurely.

COMMENT

19. (U) Botswana's multi-party democracy is vital and increasingly competitive after nearly forty years of domination by the Botswana Democratic Party. Cooperation among opposition parties and a bolder independent press are strengthening political plurality. Persistent divisions within the ruling party are creating new opportunities for opposition politicians. The peaceful conduct of the elections and universal respect for their results testifies to the strength of Botswana's democratic institutions.

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